

Priest pleads guilty to sex assault charge

Emo could get up to one year in jail

By JACK JONES
STAFF WRITER

A priest could spend a year in jail after pleading guilty to first-degree sexual assault.

The Rev. Eugene Emo, 61, who was arrested by State Police a year ago at Holy Trinity church in Webster, faces a maximum of one year in jail under a plea bargain approved by Steuben County Court Judge Donald G. Purple.

District Attorney John Tunney refused to comment yesterday on the sentence.



Emo was a chaplain at the Canandaigua Veterans Affairs Medical Center while serving as pastor of St. Januarius Church in Naples between 1987 and 1993. He pleaded guilty last week to a single count of first-degree sexual abuse, Tunney said yesterday.

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The charge was related to an allegation that Emo engaged in sexual activity with a developmentally disabled man.

The sexual assaults on the victim, a man in his 30s who under the law was found incapable of giving consent because of his mental disability, occurred during a single weekend at Emo's home in Cohocton, Steuben County.

Emo originally was indicted on eight counts by a grand jury.

He could have received up to seven years in prison for the first-degree sexual abuse charge if he had gone to trial and had been found guilty, Tunney said.

Christopher Casey, a member of the St. Januarius parish council, said the church has recovered from the shock of Emo's arrest.

The church was left divided and in turmoil four years ago when diocesan officials in Rochester removed Emo from Naples without explanation amid allegations of stolen money and sexual improprieties on church property.

"At least the wheels of justice did go around," Casey said. "Father Emo needed help and he needed to be out of our parish."

State Police and the Ontario County district attorney's office have said that the five-year statute of limitations expired on charges that other alleged victims made against Emo after his arrest.

Emo, described by parishioners as an extroverted and charismatic church leader, has served at several parishes in the Rochester area.

He was placed on leave by the diocese after his arrest last year and has remained free on \$1,000 bail.

The Diocese of Rochester will review his status after his sentencing, said spokeswoman Liz Brown. □

